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GROWING GOOD AGRICULTURAL JOBS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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INTRODUCTION

A recent report on food security in British Columbia (BC) issues a ‘wake up call’ for the province, underscoring the risks of continuing to rely heavily on fresh produce imports from persistently drought-stricken California (Mansfield, 2014). As a way to mitigate sticker shock from predicted increases in fruit and vegetable prices, particularly in light of climate change, the report recommends strengthening BC’s capacity to produce and consume local food. The report further highlights how investing in a regionalized food economy could support job creation in numerous agrifood sub-sectors.

What is the current picture of agrifood jobs in BC? Out of a total provincial workforce of 2.3 million, the agrifoods sector accounts for 60,000 jobsⁱ. The BC Jobs Plan Agrifoods Strategy aims to grow revenues in the agrifoods sector from \$11 billion to \$14 billion by 2017 (Government of BC, 2014). In Abbotsford, for instance, farm gate sales are already estimated to support nearly 4,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs, with an additional 7,340 FTE jobs generated through agribusiness and value-added revenues combined with secondary impacts from agricultural wages and revenues spent in the community (BC Ministry of Agriculture, 2008). The BC food and beverage processing industry is the largest manufacturing industry in the province. In 2012 it employed 31,800 people, with \$8.2 billion in sales (BC Ministry of Agriculture, 2013a; Rice, 2014). In the same year, BC farms hired upwards of 12,000 agriculture and horticulture workersⁱⁱ. Since 2004, farmers’ reports of labour shortages have prompted the seasonal hiring of farm workers through the federally administered Temporary Foreign Worker Program; migrant farm workers now account for close to half of the province’s farm workers.

It is clear, then, that expanding BC’s agricultural economy presents an opportunity to increase the *number* of jobs in the province. The challenge, however, will be to ensure that those jobs are well protected, economically viable and dignified.

In this paper, we focus on advancing good jobs for beginner farmers and hired farm workers. By ‘good jobs’, we are referring to employment that involves a fair wage, meets or exceeds safety standards, allows for both job stability as well as the freedom to change jobs, ensures workers and their families have equitable access to social protections, provides

opportunities for personal development and social integration, and enables people to participate in workplace decisions that impact their lives (ILO, 2006). The quality of jobs in BC agriculture, however, has long been the antithesis of ‘good’ work. Poverty and precariousness have widely characterized the experiences of both farmers and hired farm workers in North America (Pilgeram, 2011; Fairey et al., 2008). Hired farm jobs in particular tend to be filled by racialized and marginalized groups who have few decent alternatives (Gray, 2014).

We contend that there is nothing inevitable about the precariousness and lack of economic viability that are often associated with agricultural employment. On the contrary, promoting good agricultural jobs in BC is an opportunity to revive economies in rural communities, reverse the widespread marginalization of newcomers and migrants, and address youth unemployment. In addition, supporting ecologically sound modes of food production offers the potential to stimulate a suite of ‘green’ jobs.

In considering ways to improve livelihoods for both farmers and farm workers in BC, we recognize the potential for a paradox. A reliance on low-wage, marginalized farm workers remains a critical aspect of keeping BC food costs low and farming enterprises economically viable. Confronted with a cost-price squeeze and globalized competition, curbing farm labour costs remains one of the primary ways that farmers seek to eke out a profit (Barnetson, 2009; Skogstad, 1979; 1987; 2007). This reliance on hired workers is true for both ‘conventional’ and ‘alternative’ food production; many diversified and organic farms use labour-intensive techniques as substitutes for agrochemical inputs and mechanization (Alkon, 2013; Getz, Brown, & Shreck, 2008; Gliessman, 2007; Walker, 2012). Within contemporary capitalist wage-labour relations, it may not be possible in all cases to reconcile the sometimes-competing interests of farm workers and their employers. However, in the spirit of taking steps toward a system of livelihoods that better meets everyone’s needs, we find it productive to consider ways of advancing good jobs for both farmers and farm workers.

Our paper is divided into two broad policy areas for strengthening good jobs in BC agriculture. Throughout, we draw upon surveys, interviews, document analysis and ethnographic fieldwork carried out across the province. To begin, we consider some of the potential solutions to support young and beginning farmers. We focus in particular on advancing farmland access and protection through both conventional and alternative land access models. In addition, we discuss the largely overlooked opportunity to support migrants with agricultural skills and experience who wish to establish farm enterprises in BC. The second section focuses on hired farm workers in BC and considers policies to improve equity and quality of work for un(der)paid interns, newcomers and migrants. We conclude by revisiting some of the key policy opportunities for realizing good farming jobs in BC.

SECTION 1: SUPPORTING YOUNG, BEGINNING, AND MIGRANT FARMERS

DECLINING YOUNG FARMERS IN BC

The number of young farmers has steadily declined in BC and across Canada over the last two decades. In 2011, less than 6% of BC farmers were under the age of 35, and more than half were over 55 years of age (Figure 1) (StatCan, 2012g). As farmers reach retirement age in BC, the declining numbers of young people entering agriculture present a significant challenge to the conservation of farmland and the continuity of farming in the province. The decline in people entering careers in farming is partially a result of the failure of farming jobs to adequately meet the criteria of good jobs. For instance, the total average net farm income in BC has been stagnant, with significant numbers of farm operators in BC reporting negative income, the majority relying on off-farm income, and an increasing number who rented farmland (associated with reduction in security and stability) (Figures 2 and 3) (StatCan, 2012c; 2012e; 2012d; 2012g).

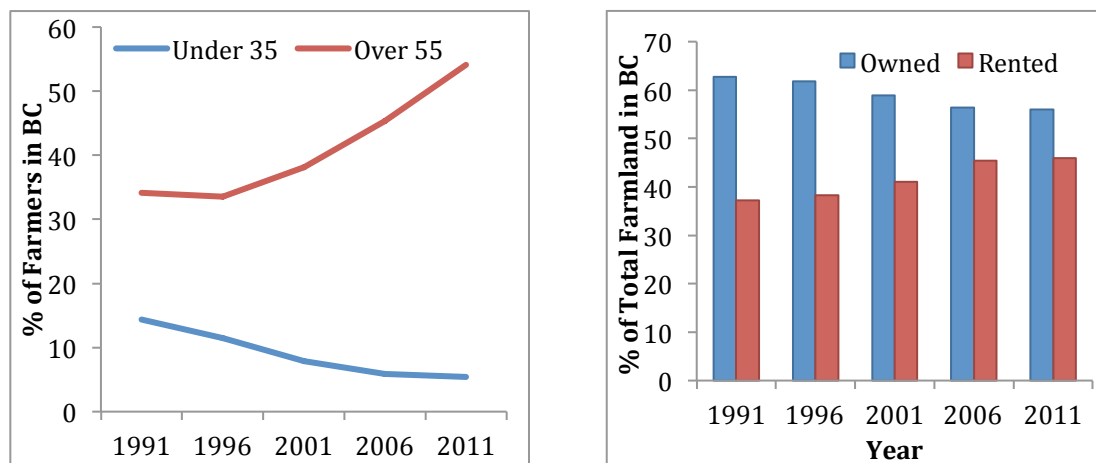


Figure 1 (left). Trend towards declining young farmers and rising proportion of farmers over 55 years of age in BC (StatCan, 2012f).

Figure 2 (right). Decreasing proportion of the total area of farmland that is owned and increasing proportion of the total area of farmland rented in British Columbia (StatCan, 2012c).

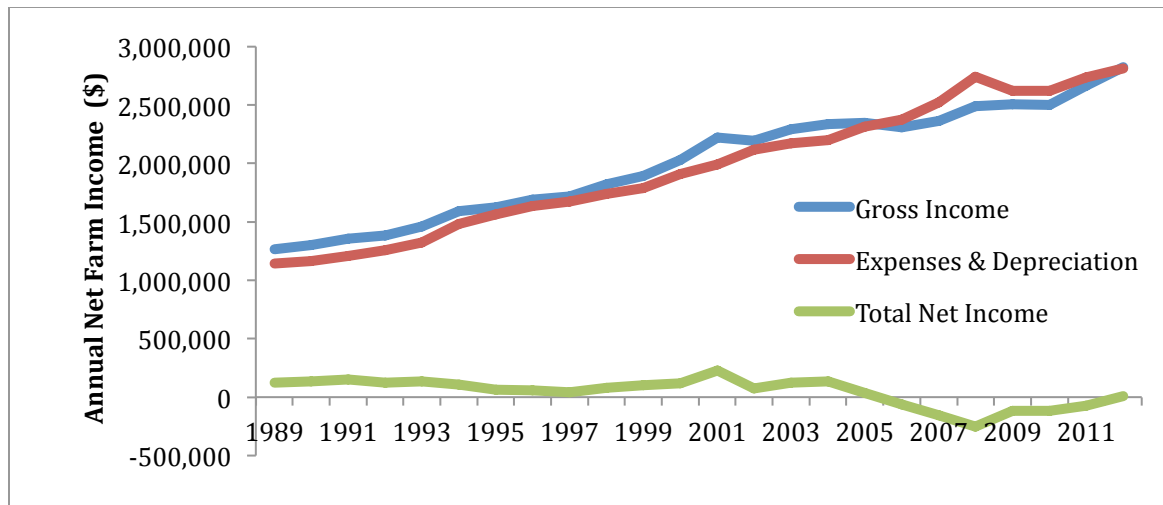


Figure 3. Stagnating and at times negative total net farm income in BC. Total net income is the gross income (cash receipts, in-kind income and value of inventory change) minus the operating expenses and depreciation charges (StatCan, 2012c).

RENEWED INTEREST & NON-TRADITIONAL ENTRANTS

Despite this negative outlook, our research has documented a resurgence of interest in farming as a career, in particular amongst young people from non-farming backgrounds. This growing interest is reflected in the emergence and growth of beginning and young farmer networks such as the BC Young Farmers network, Young Agrarians, and the Beyond The Market Initiative, as well as in the growth in beginning farmer training programs such as the UBC Farm Practicum Program, the Richmond Farm School and the Kootenay Farm School. For example, participation in programs sponsored by the Young Agrarians doubled between 2012 and 2013, with projections for further growth to over 2,500 program participants across the province by the end of 2014 (Dory & Dent, 2014).

To better understand the situation faced by beginning farmers, we carried out a survey of prospective and beginning farmers in BC. We found that 85% of prospective farmers and 72% of beginning farmers were from non-farming backgrounds. Similarly, surveys of young and beginning ecological farmers conducted in Ontario and the US found that 73% and 78% of respondents, respectively, came from a non-farming background (FarmStart, 2012, Shute, 2011). People seeking to enter agriculture from non-farming backgrounds often do not have access to on-farm training or family land, highlighting the need for training, support and land access programs and policies to facilitate new entrants and successful job creation in agriculture.

Of the prospective farmer respondents, 73% were under the age of 35, and the dominant age category of people entering farmer-training programs was 20–35. Small-scale, diversified production was favoured amongst the respondents, with a large majority farming or looking to farm under 20 acres. Environmental stewardship, as well as organic

and ecological practices were indicated as highly valued by a large majority of respondents. Beginning farmer networks such as Young Agrarians in BC and the Greenhorns in the US have an explicit mandate to support the growth of ecological farming, underscoring the potential for ‘green’ job creation among youth in rural areas.

Young and beginning farmers in BC are seeking work in agriculture because they consider it meaningful, both in terms of personal satisfaction and contributing to social and ecological food system sustainability. Yet alongside a re-valuation of agrarian livelihoods, there are significant barriers to the successful establishment of new farm entrants. This theme was articulated by one of our interview participants who works with young farmers: “There is a big gap between the dream and the reality [of farming], and the ability to bridge that gap is huge.” Only 30% of new farm businesses in BC survive the first five years (BC Ministry of Agriculture, 2013b). The resurgence of interest in food production is an opportunity for growing good jobs in BC, but it needs to be supported by policy and programming to overcome the many structural barriers to success that shape the current realities of farming.

BARRIERS TO ENTRY – FARMLAND ACCESS

Our survey respondents ranked the significance of 15 barriers to new farm establishment, and cost of land was found to be the most significant barrier (see Table 1).

Table 1: Top 5 Most Significant Barriers to Establishment

Respondents rated the significance of 15 barriers to establishment on a 7-point labeled scale. The percentage in brackets denotes the number of respondents who considered the barrier as ‘extremely’ or ‘highly’ significant.

Prospective Farmers (n=51)	Current Young/Beginning Farmers (n=34)
1. Cost of land (78%)	1. Cost of land (65%)
2. Lack of capital (65%)	2. Lack of capital (53%)
3. Lack of farmland currently available (45%)	3. Lack of farmland currently available (38%)
4. Lack of appropriate type of farmland (45%)	4. Access to credit (35%)
5. Access to credit (44%)	5. Low profitability in the agricultural sector (33%)

An analysis of demographic and economic variables driving the decline of young farm entrants in the US found that the rising cost of land correlated with decreased entry (Gale, 1993). A 2011 survey in the US also reported that a lack of capital and land access were the biggest challenges for young farmers (Shute et al., 2011). Farmland is becoming increasingly inaccessible to farmers in BC as a result of the rising cost of land, financial investment and speculation in farmland, continued removal of prime farmland from the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) for development, and widespread non-farm uses of farmland in the ALR (Figures 4 and 5) (ALC, 2010; City of Abbotsford, 2011; StatCan, 2012a). BC is regionally diverse and land access was found to be a less significant barrier than other factors, such as depopulation and economic decline, in the more rural North and East Kootenay regions. However overall we found that land access is a highly significant

barrier, and farmland protection and access policies are fundamental to supporting new entrants into farming and to advancing a vibrant regional agricultural economy in BC.

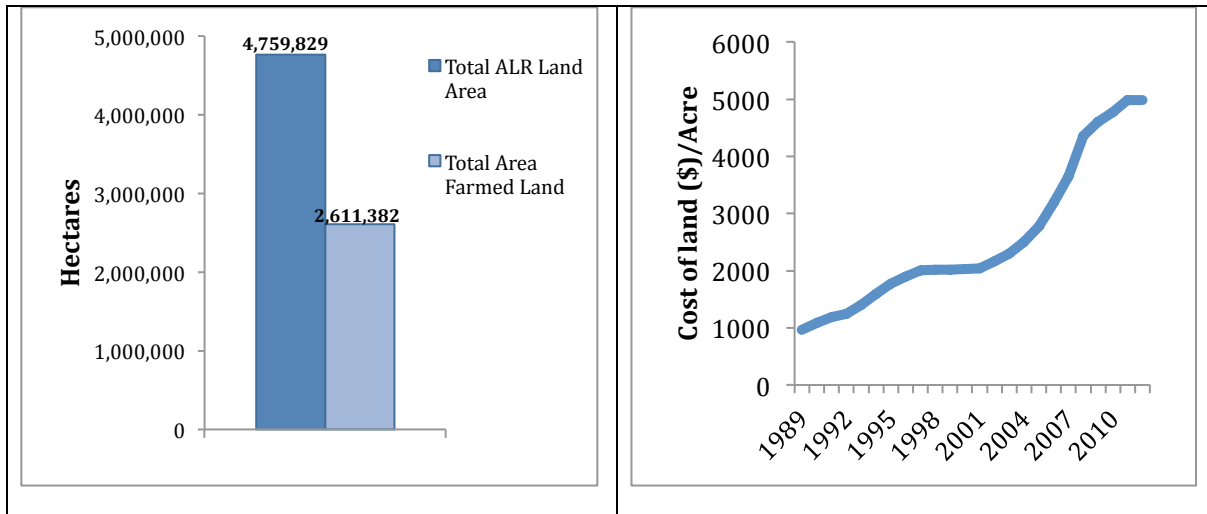


Figure 4 (left). The area of land farmed reported in the 2011 census is 55% of the total area of land in the Agricultural Land Reserve, non-farm use of farmland is highly problematic (ALC, 2010; StatCan, 2012e).

Figure 5 (right). The value per acre of farm land and buildings is on the rise in BC and across Canada, near urban areas farmland has been reported to reach up to \$100,000/acre (Mullinix et al., 2013; StatCan, 2012b).

FARMLAND ACCESS INITIATIVES

Our research has documented the emergence and growth of a diversity of alternative land access models in BC in response to barriers to land access. These alternatives to traditional individual land ownership include incubator farms, cooperatives, farmland trusts, farming on public land, backyard farming, and informal land sharing structures. Alternative models of land access are one solution for addressing the land access challenges being practiced by farmers and the voluntary sector, and a suite of complementary policies can advance these initiatives.

In the case of cooperative models, the cost of the land is distributed across the co-op members, and in the case of a land trust, a non-profit organization acquires the land, effectively removing it from a speculative land market, and makes it accessible through affordable long-term leases to farmers. Covenants, which are legally binding agreements outlining restricted/permitted land uses attached to and transferred with the title of the land, are another mechanism available to land trusts or government. Land in the Agricultural Land Reserve remains subject to market speculation and does not adequately protect against non-farm uses, which has contributed to the rising cost of farmland. The use of land trusts or covenants has the potential to remove land from speculative markets (land held in trust) and/or ensure farm-use of farmland (agricultural covenant), thereby limiting the land value to its agricultural value as well as ensuring that farmland is used for farming. However, we found that the use of land trusts and covenants, driven by the

voluntary sector, have had limited success to date in BC. There is not currently a well-established land trust organization that accepts, acquires, or places covenants on farmland in BC. Furthermore, private/voluntary models involving land acquisition – including cooperatives and trusts – also have difficulty effectively overcoming the cost of land acquisition.

Some alternative land access models – such as informal sharing agreements, which are especially common in urban and peri-urban farming initiatives – involve short-term access and/or lack tenure security. In BC, agricultural property owners get a tax benefit if they, or a lessee farmer, produce a minimum income from farming the land (BC Assessment, 2014). On the one hand this policy encourages some landowners to provide land access to farmers, on the other hand it provides a monetary benefit incentivizing residential uses of farmland. While some farmers expressed that they did not need to own land or have traditional tenure security to be successful, our survey findings indicated that many of the prospective and beginning farmers valued tenure security and expressed a preference for land ownership. In our survey, private ownership was the desired land access model for 67% of prospective farmer respondents, and 100% of all respondents indicated that they hope to own land (individually or shared) in the future. There is a need for policies to support both alternative land access models, particularly those with tenure security, as well as policies to address the root problems inhibiting ownership of farmland by farmers and/or local community stakeholders.

We also found a growth in and demand for land based agricultural training programs. These include incubator farms that provide short-term land access to beginning farmers for a limited amount of time to facilitate establishment without large financial investment, and farm school programs run by non-profits and/or university institutions. However, the BC Jobs Plan places little emphasis on primary agriculture and the associated BC Skills and Training Plan has only one mention of agriculture, which is in the preface (Government of BC, 2012; 2014). An interview participant from an agricultural training program commented, “When we compare the program to other type of career readiness programs offered by the college, our students just don’t qualify for the same type of financial support.” Another interview participant involved in on-farm training stated, “You can get a federal grant ... to get training to be an electrician and go to the oil patch, but you can’t get a penny to be a farmer. Now there is something wrong with that.”

ACCESS TO FARM ENTERPRISES FOR MIGRANT FARM WORKERS IN BC

In order to address the issue of ageing farmers in BC and its implications for food security, the food movement has sought creative ways to encourage young people to pursue careers in farming. The province already encompasses the largest proportion of immigrants in the farming population (24.4%, compared to 9.0% in Canada as a whole) (StatCan, 2011b). However, BC’s food movement may be overlooking agricultural migrants who come to

Canada through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) as potential partners in developing a vision of dignified, human-intensive agriculture. Migrant farm workers often have a great deal of experience in various modes of agriculture in Canada, and many migrants produce food on a subsistence basis in their home countries during the off-season (Binford, 2013). At least some migrants have an interest in pursuing agroecologically-based forms of food production on their own terms in Canada and have expressed a desire to immigrate to Canada. Greater attention should be given to the affinities between the goals of sustainability-oriented food networks in BC and some migrants' farming interests.

Similar possibilities have been realized with migrant farm workers in the U.S. For instance, Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern (2013) describes the experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers who are now pursuing their own small-scale, biodiverse and family-run farms in California and Virginia. In Salinas, California, the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) provides a five-year training program for migrant farm workers as a route out of poverty, along with access to incubator farms (Garrigues, 2014). Such strides are all the more remarkable considering the long history of farm worker exploitation in California's Salinas Valley (Ganz, 2009). Indeed, the cheapness of the fresh produce that BC imports from California, noted at the beginning of our report, is subsidized in no small part by the low-wage labour of 'undocumented' farm workers from Mexico (Guthman, 2004; Wells, 1996).

The national grassroots organization Food Secure Canada has indicated recognition of the opportunity to involve migrants as partners defining a food system that meets everyone's needs. In one of its discussion papers leading up to its *People's Food Policy*, Food Secure Canada (2011) calls for citizenship rights for farm workers along with laws and enforcement to ensure humane working conditions. It argues, "Canada would gain farmer citizens and a diversity of expertise in alternative approaches to food production, all at a minimal cost" (p. 14). Food Secure Canada's proposal for migrant farm workers to gain access to citizenship rights is consistent with the demands of some migrants and campaigns of migrant advocacy groups. These include Justicia for Migrant Workers, No One is Illegal, and the BC Employment Standards Coalition, which variously call for a route to permanent citizenship, an inclusive, unconditional and ongoing regularization program, immediate landed status upon arrival for all migrants and their families, and/or challenging the basis of state citizenship as a legitimate means of controlling people's right to leave or stay in a given geopolitical location (McLaughlin, 2009; Walia, 2013; Weiler & Otero, 2013).

POLICY AREAS TO SUPPORT NEW FARM ENTRANTS IN BC

1. LAND BASED AGRICULTURAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- **Provide Public Land for Incubator Farms:** In incubator models like the Richmond Incubator Farm and Haliburton Farm in Saanich, the city provides public land to farmers and a local non-profit society oversees the project. We recommend that municipalities elsewhere in BC provide public land at no cost to support the establishment of incubator farms and land-based training programs. Regionally distributed incubator farms can be used to help attract young/beginning farmers and revive agricultural production in rural areas that have available land but lack people willing to farm it.
- **Advance Jobs in Sustainable Small Scale Farming:** We recommend that the provincial government use job creation policy measures such as the BC Jobs Plan, BC Skills and Training Plan, and agricultural sector development plans such as Growing Forward 2 to specifically advance and direct resources to sector growth, job training opportunities and job creation in sustainable, locally oriented primary production. We recommend that the provincial government partner with non-profit and university farmer apprenticeship, training, and incubator programs to provide resources and support the growth of beginning farmer programs. For individuals entering agricultural training programs, the BC government should provide support similar to that provided for youth entering other trades in BC.

2. LAND USE POLICIES: INTEGRATED FARMLAND PROTECTION & ACCESS

- **Strengthen the Agricultural Land Reserve:** The ALR has been a key policy for protecting farmland in BC. The integrity of the Agricultural Land Commission Act (ALCA) and ALR must be ensured. Exclusion of prime ALR land must halt and the regulation of non-farm uses must be limited within the ALCA. Recent changes to the ALCA (Bill 24) to increase permitted non-farm uses on farmland should be repealed. Municipal zoning, Official Community Plans, regional growth strategies, agriculture and food strategies should include mandates and mechanisms to reinforce the protection of ALR land and prioritize farm uses.
- **Establish a Land Trust or Land Bank:** Develop a provincial and/or municipal Land Bank through public-voluntary sector cooperation to increase affordable access to farm and foodlands¹. The land would be held by the government and managed by a non-profit society to support incubator farms, to provide access to long-term leases, and to stabilize farmland prices through removal from development pressures. A government partnership would help to overcome limitations that voluntary sector-led land trust initiatives have faced – primarily the cost of land acquisition and holding. This

¹ The term “foodlands trust” entails protecting and making land accessible for diverse food production and harvesting systems beyond settler-colonial agriculture. The shift toward this terminology emerged from the 2014 BC Food Systems Network Gathering with input from Indigenous participants.

recommendation has been made previously at the provincial level, by municipalities and within the private and voluntary sectors and requires action.

- **Promote Utilization of Covenants:** Affirmative agricultural covenants have the potential to limit the use of farmland to farming only, thereby curtailing speculation for development and reducing the market value of the land to the farm use value. While such covenants can be established in theory in BC, there is a lack of precedence and a lack of an organization with the expertise to establish and hold such covenants. We recommend that the provincial government consider the use of government-held covenants and collaborate with voluntary sector land trust initiatives to explore this option.
- **Regulate Non-Farm Use and Speculation:** We recommend that the provincial government strike a task force charged with developing and implementing policies to limit non-farm use and speculation on ALR lands both at the provincial and municipal levels. Policies for consideration include increasing property taxes to owners of unfarmed agricultural land, raising the minimum income generated from farmland to achieve reduced property taxes (farm tax status), regulating against non-occupancy ownership of farmland (foreign or Canadian), and establishing a requirement at the time of purchase for demonstrable agricultural use.

3. NEW IMMIGRANT FARMERS

- **Citizenship for Migrant Farm Workers:** In light of farmer attrition and farm labour shortages in BC and Canada, access to Canadian citizenship should be enabled for migrant farm workers to transition into independent farm operator positions and/or stable, salaried farm labour positions in BC and Canada. We further recommend developing training programs and incubator farms specific to newcomer farmers in BC (see Ontario's program for New Canadians, FarmStart, 2014).

SECTION 2: POLICY AREAS TO IMPROVE FARM WORK IN BC

Turning to hired workers on BC farms, we begin by making some general distinctions between the three groups of BC farm workers considered here: immigrants, migrants and interns. In 2011, there were over 12,000 agriculture and horticulture workers in the province; just over half were recent immigrants and slightly less than half were migrants. Data from 2012 indicates 6,143 employees were bonded for licensed farm labour contractors serving horticultural firms (Ministry, 2014), which serves as a rough proxy for the number of recent immigrant farm workers (see Otero & Preibisch, 2010). Approximately 6,045 migrant farm workers were hired in BC in 2012 (based on TFWP agricultural positions on positive labour market opinions) (ESDC, 2014c). While there are no reliable data available on the extent of un(der)paid farming internships in BC, Stewards of Irreplaceable Land (SOIL), a directory that connects aspiring apprentices with farmers, had 61 farm apprenticeship hosts in BC in 2013. Worldwide Workers on Organic Farms

(WWOOF) Canada, which generally involves shorter volunteer work homestays, indicated that out of 8,000 annual WWOOF-stays in Canada, half of its registered hosts were in BC. Many internships are also arranged informally between farmers and interns without any intermediary organizations.

Our purpose here is not to imply that members of all three groups experience the same working conditions, severity of precariousness, access to political power, experiences of intersecting oppression, or ability to access the means to a flourishing life. Based on the distinctions we present below, it is clear that compared to interns, immigrants and migrant farm workers face considerably higher barriers to workplace health and safety, and they generally do not have the same range of options for obtaining a livelihood. Nonetheless, with a view to advancing good jobs for all farm workers, it is productive to consider these distinct groups of farm workers in tandem.

MIGRANT FARM WORKERS

Migrant farm workers come to BC through one of several streams of the federally administered TFWP, of which the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) is the predominant stream. They are hired to work in BC nurseries, greenhouses, orchards, livestock operations, fields and food processing sites. In their study of health and safety for BC farm workers, Preibisch and Otero (2014) report that migrant farm workers in BC are overwhelmingly male and are mostly young, married and from Mexico. The SAWP involves bilateral agreements between Canada and specific sending countries, including Mexico and numerous Caribbean countries. Workers hired through the SAWP may work in Canada for up to eight months at a time (Hennebry & Preibisch, 2010). However, the much smaller number of workers in the Lower-Skilled Occupations stream or Agricultural Stream of the TFWP may come from any country. They can legally work in Canada for up to two years at a time for a maximum of four years, followed by four years of ineligibility for the program (the “4/4 rule”) (Preibisch, 2012). In the absence of even a nominal representative for workers through a sending country Consulate, these newer TFWP streams represent a trend toward further neoliberal deregulation, and they leave migrants more vulnerable to extortion by private recruiters in Canada (Binford, 2013; Preibisch, 2012).

One of the key factors that positions migrant farm workers as vulnerable to ill health or workplace injury, excessive working hours and poor treatment by employers is the tying of SAWP workers’ ability to legally work in Canada with the initial farm employer who hired them (Hennebry, 2012; Hennebry & Preibisch, 2010). This means that migrants in abusive employment situations who wish to change employers are often unable to switch (McLaughlin & Hennebry, 2013). Employers have the power to repatriate workers at any time after consulting with a SAWP worker’s Consulate, which tend to defer to the employer’s interests (ESDC, 2014b; 2014a; McLaughlin, 2009). In addition, migrants’ sole formal means of job security in this program is to receive a favourable end-of-year

evaluation by their employer. This acts as an incentive to engage in a high level of productivity, and to accept long working hours and unfavourable conditions without complaint (Binford, 2009; Fairey et al., 2008; Hennebry & Preibisch, 2010). Even for the small number of migrants who have worked in Canada for thirty consecutive years (Preibisch, 2012; 2007; Verduzco & Lozano, 2003), the program does not offer a route to permanent residency or citizenship.

IMMIGRANT FARM WORKERS

Migrants in BC often work alongside racialized recent immigrant farm workers. Generally, immigrant farm workers have come to BC from the Punjab region of India. They are chiefly female, middle-aged and older, and frequently they are sponsored by a husband, son-in-law or son to move to Canada as a family class immigrant. Punjabi tends to be their first language, and many have little or no English proficiency (Fairey, 2005; Fairey et al., 2008; Preibisch & Otero, 2014). While they are not affected by the same threats of repatriation as migrants, immigrant farm workers face a distinct set of precarious labour circumstances, along with a kinship-dependent citizenship status. Immigrant farm workers have reported, for example, a sense of obligation to repay family members who sponsored them, gendered family obligations, occupational vulnerabilities related to older age, and forms of coercion that arise from being employed through a farm labour contracting (FLC) system. The introduction of ethnic competition between migrants and immigrants arguably acts as a tool for labour disciplining and dampening wages (Preibisch & Otero, 2014).

UN(DER)PAID INTERNS

By ‘un(der)paid’ interns, we refer to people who are trained on and work for a farm over the course of a season, whose working hours are comparable in regularity and amount to at least a part-time employee, and who are unpaid or paid less than minimum wage. The term intern is sometimes used interchangeably and synonymously with the term ‘apprentice.’ Some BC farmers who draw upon interns describe themselves as hosts of volunteer or educational opportunities rather than as employers, even in cases where hosts require interns to work fifty hours each week over a growing season (Weiler, 2014). Un(der)paid internships in North America primarily occur on farms that are small-scale and organic, or urban (Endres, Johnson, & Tarr, 2010; Schutzbank, 2012). They typically exchange their labour on a farm for education and experience, food and housing, and sometimes a stipend (Hamilton, 2011a; Kalyuzhny, 2011). Interns tend to be highly educated and from non-farming backgrounds (Endres et al., 2010; Hamilton, 2011a; MacAuley, 2014). While some farm businesses that hire stipend-based interns on an ‘under-the-table’ basis are registered with WorkSafeBC, others are not. Similarly, some farms do not register interns as employees with Revenue Canada, in which case interns would not be eligible to access special Employment Insurance benefits intended to protect people against the risk of poverty (Weiler, 2014).

In light of the distinct challenges each of the foregoing groups faces to accessing ‘good jobs’ as hired farm workers; we propose four general policy areas and pinpoint specific items for improvement under each. These are: 1) Remuneration and hours of work; 2) Employment stability and mobility; 3) Access to political participation and representation; and 4) Integration into social benefits.

1. REMUNERATION AND HOURS OF WORK

- **Increase the Minimum Wage:** In place of the current ad hoc, discretionary system of minimum wage increases, BC’s minimum wage should be reviewed annually and indexed according to a systemic review by an independent panel using social and economic indicators. In 2014, the BC Federation of Labour recommended immediately increasing the minimum wage to \$13/hour based on the 2011 Low Income Cut-Off for a single person with no dependents living in a large city area (BC Fed, 2014). Adopting proposals for a living wage or an Unconditional Basic Income would go even further toward generating good jobs in farm work (Living Wage for Families, n.d.; Wright, 2010).
- **Abolish the Minimum Piece Rate:** Hand-harvesters who are residents of BC (i.e. not migrants) may be paid at a piece rate that varies by crop type (BC Employment Standards Branch, 2011; Brown, 2013). The piece rate wage system has been identified as a self-disciplining labour tool that encourages immigrant farm workers to work prolonged hours in order to gain eligibility for EI during the off-season. Prolonged hours elevate workers’ risk of workplace injury or working while their health is poor (Fairey et al., 2008; Preibisch & Otero, 2014). Section 18 of the Employment Standards Regulation on minimum piece rates should be abolished. Instead, the general hourly minimum wage regulation should cover all farm workers. If an employer opts to pay an additional incentive piece rate for certain crops at certain times of the season, this should be set at a level that allows farm workers to earn at least the minimum wage with reasonable effort. Ontario’s rules can be looked to as a model in this regard (BC Employment Standards Coalition, 2012a; 2012b).
- **Promote Wage Subsidies for Interns:** Some BC farm business owners and non-profit organizations that legally hire and train formally employed interns/farm workers will draw upon government wage subsidies, such as ‘Canada Summer Jobs’ (available to students) and ‘Career Focus’ (available to recent graduates). However, given the contrast between the formal administrative requirements of federal wage subsidies and the under-the-table nature of many farm internships, some farm internship arrangements may be ineligible for these subsidies (Weiler, 2014). Additional research should identify strategies to promote the use of these existing wage subsidies among farm enterprises.
- **Improve Hours of Work and Paid Rest:** The Employment Standards Act and Regulations prohibits “excessive hours” of work, which it defines as defines as

“detrimental to an employee’s health and safety” based on the determination of the Employment Standards Director (BC Employment Standards Branch, n.d.). Established with input from farm workers and labour representatives, a specific numerical upper limit for excessive working hours would help to reduce farm employers’ power to arbitrarily determine what constitutes excessive hours. In addition, the BC government should restore overtime pay, annual vacations and statutory holidays for all farm workers (Fairey et al., 2008).

2. EMPLOYMENT STABILITY AND MOBILITY

- **Increase Labour Market Freedom for Migrants:** Replacing SAWP workers’ employer-specific visas with occupation-specific work permits would enable migrant farm workers a greater degree of freedom to leave problematic worksites without penalty. As Fairey et al. (2008) recommend, workers should have the option of evaluating employers each season, with their input being used to approve or disapprove of employers’ future applications for a Labour Market Opinion. Removing employers’ right to repatriate workers, requiring employers to demonstrate just cause for dismissal, and delinking dismissal from repatriation would also promote job security and freedom for migrants (Fairey et al., 2008). Given the increasingly active role of provincial governments in shaping numerous aspects of immigrant settlement and admission (Boyd & Alboim, 2012), BC could conceivably advocate for such changes to the TFWP at a federal level.
- **Eliminate the farm labour contracting system:** Replacing the private, for-profit FLC system with a non-profit hiring hall model for both migrant and immigrant farm workers could help to reduce forms of coercion that immigrant farm workers have reported with the FLC. This non-profit could also coordinate agricultural support centres for all farm workers (Fairey et al., 2008; Preibisch and Otero, 2014).
- **Register all Migrant Employers and Recruiters:** Using Manitoba’s 2009 *Worker Recruitment and Protection Act* as a model, BC should consult with migrants and community representatives to establish a provincial registration system for migrant employers, which would provide clear, up-to-date information on the numbers and whereabouts of migrants (CCR, 2013). As in Manitoba, this could give the BC government the ability to reject an employer’s job offer and maintain veto power over the federal Labour Market Opinion process. In addition, requiring private recruiters, consultants and immigration service providers to obtain a provincial license and imposing severe penalties on recruiter abuse could help to mitigate against the vulnerability non-SAWP migrant farm workers face in relation to private recruiters in Canada (CCR, 2013; Preibisch, 2012).

3. ACCESS TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

- **Establish an Independent Agricultural Compliance Team:** A formally recognized compliance team including representatives of farm workers, organized labour, and community organizations should be established to oversee random spot-checks at farms and proactively ensure compliance with existing regulations (Fairey et al., 2008; Otero & Aguilar, 2013). This would include verifying that employers of migrant farm workers meet at least the minimum requirements for on-site housing, and that they do not impose patronizing restrictions on migrants' off-work activities and mobility. As suggested by a Mexican SAWP participant in the study by Fairey and colleagues (2008), political participation for migrants might take the form of a "debate roundtable" similar to those practiced in Mexico. This participant asserted, "If we are united, we are a little stronger, and they have to listen to us a little more" (p. 61).
- **Promote Farm Worker Representation on Food Policy Councils:** Providing special accommodations to farm workers (e.g. Skype participation in meetings, language translation support, etc.) for participation in municipal food policy councils (MacRae & Donahue, 2013) and policy advocacy organizations such as the BC Food Systems Network (Levkoe, 2014) would help to increase the channels through which farm workers can articulate their interests and visions for a better food system.
- **Access to Citizenship for Migrants:** Denying citizenship to migrants is a major barrier to exercising their rights in practice. Ideally, they and their families would be granted access to immediate landed status upon arrival, as called for by advocacy groups such as the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change. A stepwise pathway to citizenship, as in the case of the Live-In Caregiver Program, could leave migrant farm workers vulnerable during the interim between temporary migrant status and permanent residency (Walia, 2010). However, in the absence of pushing for federal immigration policy change, at the very least BC could extend its Provincial Nominee Program to include all migrant workers (UFCW, 2011; Weiler & Otero, 2013).
- **Link Internships with Formal Farmer Training Programs:** In order to ensure consistency in the quality of training and curriculum, fairness of remuneration, and housing suitability in BC farming internships, internships could be linked with existing young farmer training programs such as the Richmond Farm School and UBC Farm Practicum in Sustainable Agriculture. Such programs could also help to coordinate shared teaching/training support between different farms, potentially reducing pressure on individual farms and promoting a more diversified internship experience.

4. INTEGRATION INTO SOCIAL BENEFITS

- **Waive Health Insurance Premiums for Migrant Farm Workers:** Existing policies on health insurance for migrant farm workers in BC involve a combination of private insurance, an interim period of three months prior to eligibility for public Medical Services Plan (MSP) coverage, and employer deductions that vary by TFWP stream

(Weiler, 2014, p. 118). This has led to a great deal of confusion among migrants and hospital administrators. The BC government should grant migrant farm workers access to MSP immediately upon arrival, including an orientation to their health rights and a health card. It should also waive MSP premiums for migrant farm workers (as is the case in Ontario) in order to reduce the involvement of employers in workers' personal health affairs (Fairey et al., 2008).

- **Promote Migrants' Access to EI, CPP and English-Language Classes:** Part of migrant farm workers' wages are automatically deducted to pay into state social benefits schemes such as federal EI, income tax and Canada Pension Plan, as well as provincial or private health insurance. Nevertheless, they often face legal and practical constraints to accessing these benefits. BC should advocate for improvements to migrants' access to EI and the Canada Pension Plan. In particular, migrant farm workers and their advocates have decried the reversal in 2012 of migrants' access to special EI parental, maternal and compassionate benefits (Keung, 2012). Enabling migrant farm workers' access to government-funded English-language classes, which are available to other newcomers, could help to address widespread issues of occupational health, safety and social isolation that arise in part due to language barriers.
- **Align WorkSafeBC Coverage with Intern Needs:** As identified by Weiler (2014, p. 55), two current WorkSafeBC practices may act as a disincentive among those farm employers who hire interns on an 'under-the-table' basis to register with WorkSafeBC. First, WorkSafeBC should enact a policy of not sharing information about non-complying employers with BC Employment Standards (or Revenue Canada). Second, in the event that an intern is injured while working for a farmer who is not registered with WorkSafeBC, the more closely the intern's stipend approximates minimum wage, the more liable is the farm employer to pay full back-dated work-related injury costs. This theoretically discourages farms hosts from offering a stipend that matches the minimum wage or is close to it. WorkSafeBC should develop a policy that eliminates this disproportionate penalty for higher-paying (but unregistered) intern hosts.

CONCLUSION

Expanding the capacity for regional food production in BC while improving the working conditions, economic viability and quality of life associated with farming jobs remains a pressing challenge. In this paper, we highlighted some of the policy solutions to support young and beginning farmers in BC, in particular regarding land access and farmland protection. For farm workers, many of the policy solutions we recommend lie in strengthening workers' social protections, reconfiguring Canada's immigration policies to advance the well-being of racialized people from the Majority World, and promoting workers' access to greater decision-making power over the labour process and livelihood self-determination. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the issue of

economic viability for primary food production in depth, significant policy support is also required in this area. This might include, for instance, local food public procurement policies, regional food distribution infrastructure, and targeted support for affordable BC-grown food access among lower-income communities. Our hope is that this paper can serve to generate constructive discussion and action toward generating more dignified livelihoods for those who do the vital work of producing our food.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ The figure of 2.3 million jobs includes people employed under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. The figure of 60,000 is drawn from the Statistics Canada's 2012 National Labour Force Survey. The agrifoods sector includes jobs in agriculture (26,000), food and beverage processing (31,800), as well as commercial fishing and aquaculture (3,800) (Government of BC, 2014).

ⁱⁱ The National Household Survey indicates there were 11,505 agriculture and horticulture workers in BC in 2011; this voluntary survey does not exclude temporary residents (StatCan, 2011a). In 2012, based on the number of Temporary Foreign Worker positions on positive labour market opinions, 6,045 migrant farm workers were hired in BC (ESDC, 2014c). During the same year, BC farms hired approximately 6,143 immigrant farm workers (based on employees bonded for BC licensed farm labour contractors serving horticultural firms) (Ministry, 2014, see also Otero & Preibisch, 2010).

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